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ABSTRACT

The Arab states with their rich background of Islamic and Arab civilizations are continuing their efforts to enhance cultural development either through different forms and levels of education or other activities. Attaining better interaction with other nations is the goal of these efforts. The process of coordinating educational and cultural strategies in Arab states evolves in the contexts of overall development plans that range from 3 to 9 years in duration. The focus for most countries in the region is the promotion of literacy and basic education. Funds for financing educational and cultural activities derive mainly from the government. The centrally designed curricula in each country reflect the incorporation of elements of national cultural heritage and traditional indigenous culture. The Arab states develop understanding and respect of individuals for national as well as other cultures by using Arabic, promoting linguistic and cultural exchanges, and organizing cultural activities. Implications for future development focus on the curriculum consisting of values, ideals, and life goals to achieve a better future for all and not on various disciplines to be learned. (CK)

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CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION TO CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

"The Contribution of Education to Culture Development in the Arab States"

by

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and quite a privilege to me to have the opportunity of addressing the Forty-Third Session of the ICE, and making a brief presentation on some of the efforts exerted in the Arab Member States for reinforcing the cultural development through education, hoping that I will succeed in giving a true image of the actual situation in the region.

The Arab states with their rich background of Islamic and Arab civilization, which made significant contributions in various fields of knowledge including medicine, engineering, architecture, astronomy, mathematics, arts, music, sociology and philosophy ... etc, are now continuing their efforts in enhancing cultural development, either through different forms and levels of education or other activities, with a view to attaining better interaction with other nations.

In order to highlight the current situation in the Arab region with regard to the themes and sub-themes of conference, I have the pleasure to present to the distinguished audience an overview of these efforts.

In the Arab states, the process of co-ordinating educational and cultural policies/strategies is mostly achieved in the context of the overall development plans, the duration of which ranges between three to nine years. The objectives of educational plans, though varied in the different countries of the region, are mainly concerned with introducing reforms into the various aspects of the educational process, to ensure quality and relevance of education to national socio-economic development requirements. As far as culture is concerned, the plans aim at strengthening cultural identity and awareness among citizens, promoting cultural interaction with other nations, and safeguarding the cultural heritage. These correspond to the objectives of the World Decade for Cultural Development. Implementation of these plans is mainly the responsibility of the government bodies : ministries concerned with education and culture as well as councils, committees and boards in which partners such as concerned NGOs, clubs, universities, and private sector are represented.

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In pursuing their educational and cultural policies, most countries of the region give top priority to the promotion of literacy and basic education. In a region with such rich historical heritage, religious traditions and cultural wealth, this priority seems to be absolutely the right option for strengthening cultural identity. Other priority areas are : safeguarding national cultural heritage, and developing ethical and moral values, in addition to increasing knowledge about and inculcating respect for other nations' cultures which facilitate cultural dialogue, and in turn, enhance the desired mutual respect.

Linguistic exchanges with other countries are considered in all countries of the region one of the major approaches for developing intercultural dialogue and cultural interaction. It is worth mentioning in this respect, the importance given to teaching foreign languages in all the Arab States since a long time, particularly English and French languages which are the most common second languages taught in the region. This reflects the aim of educational policies to inculcate positive attitudes towards other cultures, which enhance understanding and respect of cultural diversity. However, some difficulties have been recently observed in learning foreign languages. These are largely attributed to the teaching performance and probably to inappropriate teaching materials, rather than to priorities of policies and strategies.

Thus, teaching foreign languages has been given more attention in the Arab States to attain better standard of teaching languages other than the mother tongue, in order to facilitate cultural dialogue and interaction with other nations on the one hand, and to keep pace with the growing trend of students' movement across the boundaries for pursuing studies in higher education institutions on the other. In this respect, I wish to indicate that a large number of students from the Arab region are enrolled in the universities abroad, in addition to the increased the number of foreign students in the educational institutions in the region.

The major sources for financing educational and cultural activities are mainly the government funds allocated for these purposes in the national development plans. Contributions are also made in most countries by local authorities, private sector, in addition to external assistance which some countries receive.

Public expenditure on education and culture as a percentage of GNP varies from one country to another. However, funds allocated to the education sector

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are generally much more than those allocated for culture, the allocations of which do not exceed 1 % of the budget in many Arab countries, while expenditure on education has reached in some countries a percentage which is difficult for many Arab states to exceed. Nevertheless, there is a common feeling among those responsible for education and culture in several Arab States that additional allocations should be made available to cope with the qualitative reform and quantitative expansion of education, combating illiteracy, improving teacher-training programmes and the status of teacher, the establishment of cultural centers, libraries and safeguarding the national heritage.

The cultural dimension in educational programmes is reflected in the incorporation of elements of national cultural heritage and traditional indigenous culture into the centrally designed curricula. In most Arab States such components are incorporated in the curricula of social sciences, and in some countries in the curricula of religious education. Few countries incorporate these elements in the curricula of languages, literature, or human sciences. Teachers in some countries are allowed to modify certain activities in the curricula in order to be more relevant to local environment and to reflect local culture.

It was noted that there is a common feeling in most countries of the region that traditional cultures are at risk from the pressures of contemporary life, particularly from the rapid scientific and technological changes, the mass media and the influence of other nations' cultural models. In certain cases, this attitude has resulted in the emergence of some negative social reactions of some groups which refuse to accept rapid changes, and new values that come with modern developments, Arab States have made attempts to face these challenges and to change these negative attitudes, by adopting several measures to safeguard and promote their traditional cultures through cultural and educational activities. These include, for example, forming folklore troops, promoting traditional handicrafts, establishing students' clubs and/or cultural societies, encouraging domestic tourism, organizing cultural festivals and publishing and disseminating books on national traditions, values and customs. Countries of the region have also taken several measures to enable curricula to face the challenges arising from progress in science and technology, environmental problems, the evolving requirements of the world of work and the new attitudes of young people towards education, through enhancing science and technology curricula for all levels, introducing technical education in general education, and using new educational technologies.

In the framework of the efforts exerted in the Arab states for achieving a comprehensive development and in the process of reforming their educational systems towards attaining this goal, and in view of the close linkage between environment and development, most Arab countries have started to pay attention to environmental education and the enhancement of environmental consciousness. Concepts of environmental education have been introduced in the curricula of the various levels of education, including higher education. In some countries, these concepts have been incorporated in the curricula of science and technology subjects. A new orientation has recently emerged to incorporate environmental concepts in the curricula of various subject matters, due to the fundamental role which education assumes in transforming environmental awareness into attitudes and behaviour which assist in the preservation and protection of the environment and natural resources, in addition to the rationalization of resource-consumption.

The Arab States are also keen on developing understanding and respect of individuals for national culture as well as that of others. For this purpose, some of them have made successful attempts in combining elements of traditional national culture, other nations' cultures and world heritage through curricular and extra-curricular activities. The sources of relevant information used in most Arab States for this purpose are textbooks in addition to the efforts exerted in some countries through cinema, theater and mass media.

Arabic is the mother tongue, the national and official language in all Arab states. It is also the language of instruction in general education. Other languages, mainly English and French are used in certain cases particularly, in higher education.

Linguistic and cultural exchanges in the field of education are considered important for the promotion of international, educational, cultural and scientific co-operation as well as human relations. They are mainly co-ordinated and financed by state or local authorities on bilateral or multilateral bases; and usually include exchange of educational programmes and teaching materials, in addition to school children's art exhibitions/festivals and visits between students and teachers.

Education in the Arab States plays also a role in the cultural development of the individual through ethical and civic components which form part of the

programmes aiming at increasing public awareness regarding environmental problems and appropriate means of preserving the environment.

Moreover, teachers' organizations, local authorities parents and women associations, religious bodies, the private sector, and cultural and artistic associations co-operate with schools in promoting the cultural dimension of education and in organizing cultural activities for the benefit of the community. Teacher-training institutions, UNESCO Associated Schools and UNESCO Clubs - which exist in a limited number of Arab states - also have a role in promoting cultural development and respect for other nations' cultures. It should be noted that although co-operation in this field does exist in the Arab region, yet further intensified efforts should be exerted in this direction.

Several Arab States are suffering from different problems as a result of the events which the region witnessed and is still prevailing. In addition to the problems of the Palestinian refugees, the problem of returnees has recently emerged after the Gulf war, and the refugees to some Arab states as a result to the civil war in Somalia. In spite of the efforts exerted in the countries hosting those refugees, they are still unable to cope with the problem of providing the necessary educational services, especially, when the refugees have a mother tongue different than that of the hosting country.

It is worth mentioning here, the positive role of UNRWA in training teachers who work for the Palestinian refugees inside and outside the occupied Arab territories. Moreover, reference should be made to the efforts exerted by the Arab states - in spite of their limited resources - for providing education to the refugees, nomads and population of remote areas, as well as for training of teachers who work in the areas inhabited by these groups, and offering them certain incentives which include allowances, housing, transportation and free education for their children.

In general, inter-cultural aspects are enhanced in teacher training programmes by inculcating knowledge about cultures of other nations through various disciplines such as foreign languages and literature as well as history and sociology, and through extra- curricular activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

No doubt WCEFA, the 42nd. Session of ICE and ILY have had a positive impact on literacy and basic education activities in the Arab states. It can be noted, that as a result of the renewed commitment and expanded vision to achieve education for all, efforts have been increased towards meeting basic educational needs through strengthening partnerships, enhancing public awareness, mobilizing resources and improving the learning environment.

Most Arab states have passed legislations, formulated plans and implemented follow-up activities to these events. They have also set targets for the year 2000 and have adopted measures with regard to several related areas. As far as the expansion of early childhood care and pre-school education is concerned, a number of Arab states have, for example, opened new kindergartens or expanded the available ones. With regard to the universalization of primary education and reduction of adult illiteracy rates particularly among women, most countries plan to provide basic education for all and to minimize the number of illiterates as much as possible by the year 2000. Moreover, some countries have launched or envisaged literacy/functional literacy campaigns in which partners such as community groups, teachers' organizations, mass media, universities, private sector, NGO's, and religious bodies were involved. It should be noted that increased attention is being paid to the post-literacy phase, particularly for women, to enable them to better participate in the development process.

The share of national resources allocated for literacy and primary education has been increased in most Arab states; especially the allocations of the central government. Measures taken to ensure most effective use of available resources vary from one country to the other, but generally include co-operation of various bodies in producing teaching materials, providing classrooms, furniture and other facilities and offering and training volunteering teachers. External assistance was also received mainly from UNESCO and the other co-organizers of WCEFA. However, in spite of the increase in funds and external assistance, several countries still suffer from insufficiency of the funds allocated to literacy and primary education. It is essential, therefore, that international and regional funding agencies and other donors consider increasing the financial assistance they provide to these countries.

It is obvious then, that the Arab states have made significant efforts for improving the contribution of education to cultural development of their peoples. Basic education and literacy, which have a considerable role in the cultural development of nations, have witnessed visible reforms in terms of quality and quantity. The cultural dimension is covered in the educational programmes through several disciplines as well as extra-curricular activities, including knowledge of the national cultural heritage as well as other nations' cultures, artistic and aesthetic awareness, enhancement of moral and social values and respect for all religions, cultures and traditions, in addition to teaching foreign languages which assume full significance as possible forms of international communication and inter-cultural dialogue and interaction.

Recently, the need has emerged to give due attention to environmental awareness, and to highlight environmental problems and the immediate and long-term implications of these problems on the developmental efforts in the Arab region in various fields, and means of avoiding them. In view of the urgent problems from which the region is suffering : population growth, degradation of water and food resources, land and marine pollution, desertification, depletion of natural resources ... etc, the Arab states have concentrated on raising public awareness through environmental education in formal and non-formal education as well as in teacher-training programmes. Moreover, the mass-media have intensified efforts in this field in order to increase environmental awareness among the various sectors of the society, due to the fact that both preservation and protection are among the imperatives of continuous decent life on earth, and that comprehensive and sustainable development is primarily a human process for which all elements of planning, knowledge and application are employed. However, among the factors that enhance it success is a proper, flourishing and safe environment.

It should also be mentioned that Arab States' efforts in developing educational systems in terms of quality and quantity and in enhancing the cultural dimension in educational programmes, should be intensified in order to attain more democracy of education and cultural development. The countries of the region should further their efforts, mobilize resources and benefit from the plans available in the region which emphasize the fact that educational and cultural development are integrated processes even at the level of administrative structures. Better investment of this correlation is a pre-requisite for consolidating cultural development through the educational process.

I would like also to indicate that acquainting nationals with foreign cultures is just as important as spreading national cultures abroad. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the Arab states take appropriate action for promoting their Islamic- Arab heritage and their modern cultures at the international level in order to reflect the true image of the Arabs and the richness of their culture world-wide. This will represent a step towards achieving global cultural development and interaction on equal terms.

Inter-culturality, which means understanding and respect for other cultures, and establishment of positive relationships and exchanges with other countries, should start at the grass-root level, and in the early years of schooling. Therefore, the multi- cultural dimension should be incorporated in the educational programmes all over the world, in order to provide a fertile ground for, and open the way to, international understanding and a positive view of peace.

It wish also to emphasize the fact that a skillfully managed linkage between education and cultural development can make it possible to strengthen creative identities and encourage greater opportunity of self-expression for different cultures, thereby promoting fruitful exchanges among them. Such a linkage must be based on the rejection of discrimination and on the assertion of the universal humanist values of democracy, human rights, tolerance and co-operation without which no dialogue is possible.

To this end, education should shift emphasis from a purely cognitive, to broad-based learning, meaning an all-round intellectual, physical, social and moral development of learners. Accordingly, the essence of the curriculum should not consist of various disciplines to be learned, but of values, ideals and life goals, in order to achieve better future for all. Educational goals may differ significantly depending on socio-cultural context, but to be relevant and reliable they should be related to changing life values. However, the decisive role in any educational transformation belongs to teachers. Without highly qualified and well trained teachers no reforms in the educational systems can achieve the required success.

I am confident that this gathering of distinguished policy makers and eminent experts will no doubt establish invaluable sign posts to mark a clear path for future directions, aiming at better contribution of education to cultural development.

I thank you all and wish you every success.